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## **“Inclusive and Different?” Mainstream Preservice Teachers’ Perceptions of Preparedness to Teach in Linguistically Diverse Classrooms in Australia**

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*Abstract: This article reports the results of a discourse-theoretic study that considered the perspectives of one group of preservice mainstream teachers in Australia concerning their preparedness to teach English language learners (ELLs). Framed by a theory of teacher identity and using in-depth interviews, the paper explores the perceptions and experiences of six preservice teachers, revealing the presence of two dominant discourses of ELLs: a discourse of equity and inclusiveness and a discourse of difference. The results suggested that these discourses interacted in ways unanticipated by policy makers and that an unintended consequence of this discursive interplay was that participants experienced conflict between the professional identity positions that were made available to them within these discourses. The ways in which this conflict might be overcome to support the identity construction goals of teachers of ELLs are discussed and suggestions for future research considered.*

### **Introduction**

Many countries in which English is used as the primary first language have reported rapid growth in the number of school students who speak a language other than English as their first language (de Jong & Harper, 2005; Hammond, 2014; McGee, Haworth, & MacIntyre, 2015; Yoon, 2008). For instance, in the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW), where this study was conducted, approximately 20% of all students in government schools are reported to be learning English as an additional language, with over 30% originating from a language background other than English (NSWDEC, 2014).

Recently, growing attention has been given to understanding the complex and extensive knowledge demanded of teachers of ELLs (de Jong, Harper, & Coady, 2013; Hammond, 2014). However, doubts have been raised about the preparedness of mainstream teachers in some countries to provide high-quality education for ELLs. Research has suggested that teachers may not possess the competencies to meet the learning needs of ELLs (Hutchinson & Hadjioannou, 2011), that they struggle to make sense of teaching and learning in multilingual school settings (Reeves, 2006), and have an inadequate understanding of the processes of second language acquisition (Evans, Arnot-Hopffer, & Jurich, 2005). In particular, preservice teachers reported feeling ill-prepared to teach ELLs (Siwatu, 2011), leading to a suggested disconnect between teacher education programs and the beliefs of graduating teachers about their capacity to meet the needs of their ELLs (Webster & Valeo, 2011). In Australia, Hammond (2012) argues that insufficient support exists for mainstream teachers to develop the knowledge about language and literacy essential to working effectively with ELLs (Hammond, 2012). Indeed, addressing the issue of inclusive education more generally, Forlin and Chambers (2011) report that only a small proportion of newly

graduated teachers in Australia rated their preparation for teaching students with special education needs as very good or excellent (p. 18). A potential consequence of this perceived lack of support for mainstream teachers is the perpetuation of “the deficit paradigm” (Fenner, 2014; Mills, 2008), which associates negative academic consequences with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, for example (Sharma & Lazar, 2014).

Concerns about teacher preparedness for teaching ELLs have led to suggestions that “providing teachers with adequate tools and techniques to support these learners is essential” (Facella, Rampino, & Shea, 2005, p. 209). However, while an emphasis on “tools and techniques” can provide teachers with useful instructional strategies for the classroom, the privileging of pedagogic practices risks paying insufficient attention to the role of the teacher in the provision of high quality educational experiences for ELLs. Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, and Johnson (2005), for example, argue that to understand teaching and learning “we need to understand teachers” (p. 22). Addressing this need, recent research has explored the challenges teachers of ELLs face in constructing their professional identities (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Khong & Saito, 2014). Thus, Kayi-Aydar (2015) discovered that while her participants, who were pre-service elementary school teachers in the United States, positioned themselves as either a guide or resource to ELLs or as a bridge between ELLs and the school system, they also drew attention to power relations within schools that positioned them as non-powerful in terms of their capacity to act and to teach ELLs.

According to Kayi-Aydar (2015), “given its significant role in education of ELLs, teacher identity and agency is a topic that needs further investigation” (p. 102). This study responds to this research need by examining how one group of preservice school teachers in Australia constructed their identities as teachers of ELLs. First, this investigation is contextualized by exploring some of the dominant discourses that shape the identity construction of teachers of ELLs. Next, a framework for investigating teacher identity is described and then applied to understand the identity construction experiences of six preservice teachers of ELLs in Australia. Implications for teacher education designed to support the construction of teachers’ of ELLs professional identities are discussed and suggestions for future research considered.

### **Discourses for teaching in linguistically diverse classrooms**

Millar Marsh (2002) explained that discourses, which she defined as “frameworks for thought and action that groups of individuals draw upon in order to speak and interact with one another in meaningful ways” (p. 456), position teachers and learners in particular ways. In NSW, the positioning of teachers and students is partly shaped by the identification of one group as English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) students, that is, “students whose first language is a language or dialect other than Standard Australian English who require additional support to assist them to develop English language proficiency” (NSWDEC, 2014, p. 6). One discourse of schooling that surrounds the identification of this particular group of students and which shapes the thoughts and actions of teachers is a discourse of equity and inclusiveness. In its advice to schools, for instance, the NSW Government places particular emphasis on inclusivity and equity in teaching, endorsing “*inclusive* teaching practices which recognize and value the backgrounds and cultures of all students” and committing schools “to providing opportunities which allow *all* students to achieve *equitable* education and social outcomes” (p. 4, emphasis added). Indeed, this emphasis on inclusivity and equity in teaching and learning is reflected in multicultural education policy in NSW which, implemented in 2005, states that (NSWDEC, 2005):

*Schools will ensure inclusive teaching practices which recognize and value the backgrounds of all students and promote an open and tolerant attitude towards different cultures, languages, religions and world views.*

As this policy position suggests, this discourse extends to linguistic inclusiveness, reflecting recent concern with concepts such as translanguaging practice (Canagarajah, 2013) and plurilingualism (Taylor and Snoddon, 2013), which contest the view of languages as fixed, discrete entities in favour of flexibility in classroom language practices. As Lin (2013) explains, by drawing on learners' full linguistic repertoires, plurilingual pedagogies value "the strategic, principled use of local resources to scaffold learning in both language and content classrooms" (p. 521). Although policy frameworks and advice to schools in NSW do not make explicit reference to terms such as plurilingualism, the cultural and linguistic knowledge ELLs possess are recognized as valuable resources for learning (NSWDEC, 2014, p. 11):

*Knowing about concepts in their first language (L1) can make learning English easier because a student needs only to transfer knowledge into a new language...students should be encouraged to continue to develop their first language as maintenance of L1 enhances learning a second language...all teachers are expected to use culturally and linguistically inclusive strategies that support EAL/D learners to participate in classroom activities. These strategies may include encouraging the use of first language....*

Another discourse that positioned teachers and learners in particular ways was the discourse of difference. This discourse emphasized differences between those learners positioned as "EAL/D students" and "their English speaking peers" (NSWDEC, 2014, p. 6). For example, those positioned as the former are believed to "need to learn more, and more quickly" (p. 6). In practice, the discourse of difference privileges the use of "differentiated teaching programs, practices and strategies" (NSWDEC, 2014, p.26), as well as differentiated assessment, for "EAL/D students". The discourse of difference underpinning this advice to schools is also reflected in the NSW Government's Multicultural Education Policy (NSWDEC, 2005):

*Schools, through differentiated curriculum and specific teaching and learning programs, will address the learning needs of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds requiring specific support.*

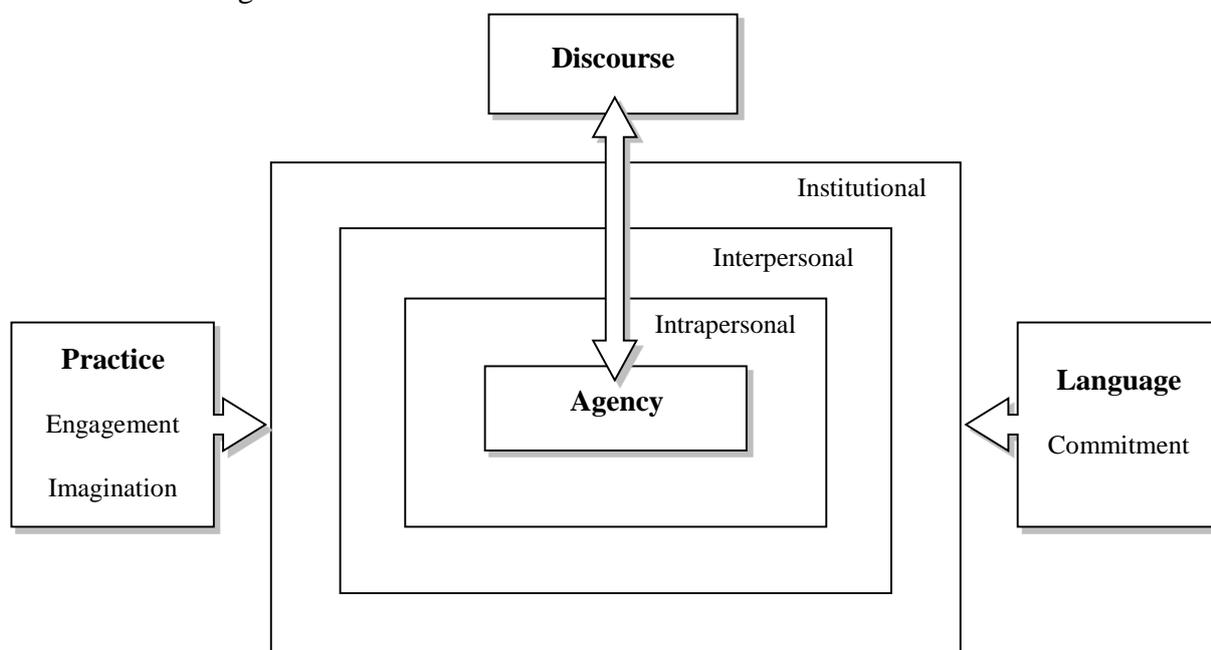
This paper builds upon previous attempts to understand the challenges facing mainstream teachers of ELLs by considering how discourses such as equity and inclusiveness and difference shaped one group of preservice teachers' professional identity construction in Australia. A contribution of this study is to question taken granted assumptions, such as those that posit an unproblematic linear link between class teachers acquiring the substantial and complex knowledge essential to providing ELLs with high quality education, the classroom application of certain tools and techniques, and improved learning outcomes for ELLs. For instance, class teachers in NSW are positioned as responsible for understanding the needs and language proficiency of ELLs, implementing differentiated teaching programs, practices, and strategies, and engaging in professional development focusing on EAL/D pedagogy (NSWDEC, 2014, p. 26).

However, as discussed in the previous section, evidence suggests that some preservice teachers in Australia question their preparedness to implement policies and advice on inclusive education in general (Forlin & Chambers, 2011) and on linguistically diverse classrooms in particular (Hammond, 2012). However, implicit in the positioning of teachers by discourses such as inclusivity and difference is the assumption that, given appropriate support through professional development, class teachers will indeed be able to acquire the knowledge required to discharge such responsibilities and, moreover, that teachers will unproblematically apply such knowledge in the form of classroom tools and techniques in

ways that necessarily lead ELLs to “achieve target language and curriculum content outcomes” (NSWDEC, 2014, p. 29). Therefore, the remainder of this paper problematizes such responses to preservice teachers’ concerns about their preparedness to teach in linguistically diverse classrooms using a framework for understanding teacher identity, which is described in the following section.

*Towards an integrated framework for understanding teacher identity*

Day (2011) defined identity as “the way we make sense of ourselves and the image of ourselves that we present to others” (p. 48), echoing Lasky’s (2005) belief that teacher identity represents the means by which “teachers define themselves to themselves and to others” (p. 901). Sachs (2005) maintained that these definitions of self constitute a framework by which teachers construct ideas about “how to be,” “how to act,” and “how to understand” their work. Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, and Johnson (2005) argued that understanding identity requires attention to both identity-in-practice and identity-in-discourse, with the former referring to the operationalization of identity through concrete practices and the latter recognizing that “identity is constructed, maintained and negotiated to a significant extent through language and discourse” (p. 23). The theoretical framework used in this paper, which draws together several themes in the literature on teacher identity construction, is summarized in Figure 1.



**Figure One. An integrated framework for investigating teacher identity**

Source: Author

**Figure 1: Language: The discursive construction of identity**

Figure 1 suggests that identity partially reflects the influence of discourse. Following Pennycook (1994), the term ‘discourse’ does not refer to language or language use

but instead “to ways of organizing meaning that are often, though not exclusively, organized through language” (p. 128). In poststructuralist theory such discourses provide individuals with subject positions from which they “actively interpret the world and by which they are themselves governed” (Weedon, 1997, p. 93).

To investigate the ways in which the teacher participants in this study perceived their positioning within the dominant discourses associated with ELLs, this paper draws upon tools for discourse analysis introduced by Fairclough (2003). Fairclough described the discursive construction of identity as the “texturing of identity,” arguing that what authors commit themselves to within texts “is an important part of how they identify themselves” (p. 164) and that the commitments an author makes can be assessed in terms of modality and evaluation. Modality refers to what individuals commit themselves to in terms of truth, obligation, and necessity, and is often displayed in the use of modal verbs such as ‘should’ and ‘must’ and modal adverbs such as ‘probably’ and ‘possibly’.

Evaluation describes what is believed to be desirable or undesirable, and is often expressed in terms of what is considered good or bad or useful and important. Evaluations can be expressed explicitly through the use of words such as ‘wonderful’ or deeply embedded in texts, thereby invoking implicit value systems. Examples of the ways in which the framework was used to understand participants’ discursive construction of teacher identities are provided in the data collection and analysis section.

### **Practice: The experiential construction of identity**

Wenger (1998) argued that “identification takes place in the doing” (p. 193). His theoretical framework conceptualizes identity construction in terms of three modes of belonging: engagement, imagination, and alignment. Through engagement, individuals establish and maintain joint enterprises, negotiate meanings, and establish relations with others. This emphasis on the individual, and their understanding of and engagement in practices and activities as one aspect of their professional identity construction, is reflected in recent attention given to the role of teachers’ cognition and behavior in understanding their identity work (Day & Lee, 2011).

In addition, the emphasis Wenger (1998) placed on relations with others in identity construction is helpful in understanding how an individual teacher constructs his or her professional identities partly through relations with mentors, school authorities, teacher educators, and other teachers (Cohen, 2010). Therefore, acknowledging the importance of individual cognition and emotions, as well as relations with others, Figure 1 includes both intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of professional identity construction.

Through imagination, Wenger’s (1998) second mode of belonging, individuals create images of the world across time and space by extrapolating beyond their own experience. Finally, alignment coordinates individuals’ activities within broader structures and enterprises, allowing them to adopt the identity of an organization, such as a school, as their own. This aspect of identity construction is recognized in Figure 1 through the inclusion of the institutional domain in investigating teacher identity.

### **Negotiating and Contesting Identity**

Wenger (1998) also investigated identity formation in terms of the negotiation of meanings that matter within a social configuration. Negotiability implies that identity is a dynamic process. This view of identity underscores the role of agency, which describes the

capacity “to do things which affect the social relationships in which [individuals] are embedded” (Layder, 2006, p. 4). However, although Wenger’s (1998) description of identity as negotiated recognizes the role that conflict can play within communities, researchers have criticized his framework for providing a “benign model” (Barton & Tusting, 2005, p. 10) that fails to adequately theorize the role of conflict and contestation in identity construction. Laclau and Mouffe (1985), in contrast, proposed a theory of social relations that does take such contestation and conflict seriously. According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985), meanings are fluid and discourses contingent, which means that there is always scope for struggle over which meanings should prevail.

Although agency is essential to teacher identity construction, a comprehensive framework must also account for the limits to teacher agency. As Beauchamp and Thomas (2011) noted, “a teacher’s experience can be one of not only active construction of an identity, but also of an imposed identity stemming from societal or cultural conceptions of teachers” (p. 7). Thus, understanding teacher identity requires recognition of how a teacher’s professional identity is shaped by, and shapes, contextual factors, such as the school environment (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). In Figure 1 the interplay of such constraint and enablement in teacher identity construction is depicted by the arrow linking discourse and agency.

Drawing upon this theoretical framework, data collection and analysis was guided by the following research question: *What are the discourses that shape the perceptions of preparedness to teach in linguistically diverse classrooms amongst one group of preservice mainstream teachers’ in Australia?*

## **The Study**

### **Context and Participants**

Six preservice teachers took part in this study. At the time of data collection, each participant was enrolled in a Master of Teaching program at a large urban university in Sydney, Australia. The Master of Teaching program is offered as an intensive preservice secondary teacher education program for post-graduate students. Students undertake courses in core educational areas as well as teaching specializations, such as English, mathematics, science, and business studies. A particular emphasis is placed on professional experience with participants undertaking 80 days of supervised teaching practice in a least two different secondary schools during the program.

As Merriam (2009) points out, different approaches to sampling can be adopted, including convenience and purposive. In the current study, sampling was guided partly by convenience in that I met the six participants during the final stages of their Master of Teaching degree when they enrolled in one of the courses I taught on the program. To minimize power differential between myself and the participants, I invited the participants to take part in the study following the completion of the course, including all assessment items.

A purposive approach to sampling was also employed. According to Patton (2002), purposive sampling in qualitative research is driven by the need for in-depth study of information-rich cases, which are “those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (p. 77). Therefore, as I was concerned with understanding how mainstream preservice teachers of ELLs construct their professional identities, I invited participants to join this study partly because they were completing a professional teaching qualification and had majored in a teaching specialization other than teaching English as a second language. Thus, the subject specializations of the participants,

whose names are pseudonymous, were: History (Stan and Philip), Drama (Brenda), Science (Cathy and Grace) and Music (Justin).

A purposive approach to sampling is also reflected in the decision to invite into the study only participants who reported having no full time teaching experience in secondary schools, other than their participation in the practicum component of the Master of Teaching degree. In addition, all of the participants self-identified English as their mother tongue and did not regard him or herself as fluent in any language other than English. Finally, each preservice teacher indicated that during the teaching practicum they had observed and taught classes that contained students identified as ELLs by a mentor teacher within their different practicum schools.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Each participant took part in a semi-structured interview, which ranged from approximately 55 to 85 minutes, and which was audiotaped and transcribed. The interview began by seeking biographical information about the participants, their qualifications and teaching experience. Other questions addressed their motivations for becoming teachers, perceptions of their preparedness to meet the challenges and opportunities that teaching students with limited knowledge of the English language in mainstream content classrooms might present, as well as their experience of teaching such students during the teaching practicum and their future career plans.

Rosiek and Heffernan (2014) reject the association of qualitative inquiry with allegedly atheoretical approaches to data analysis, suggesting that such a view “makes it difficult to critically examine the assumptions about reality and knowledge that guide this kind of research” (p. 727). According to St Pierre and Jackson (2014), qualitative researchers should make use of theory “to determine, first, what counts as data and, second, what counts as “good” or appropriate data” (p. 715). In the current study, I made use of theory in the analysis of the interview data by drawing upon the framework for investigating teacher identity described in the previous section. In particular, this meant that data analysis was guided by the premise that a comprehensive understanding of teacher identity requires attention to both ‘identity-in-discourse’ and ‘identity-in-practice’ (Varghese et al., 2005).

Therefore, to understand participants’ discursive construction of their professional identities I drew upon aspects of Laclau and Mouffe’s theory of discourse. Thus, data analysis began by identifying subject positions that the participants identified as relevant to their identity construction. For instance, by locating frequently repeated topics and terms in the data, identity positions such as “teacher” and “English language learner” emerged as master signifiers or nodal points of identity which, in the words of Patton (2002), represented “indigenous concepts” because they were “terms used by informants themselves” (p. 454-55).

According to Laclau and Mouffe, ordered around such nodal points of identity are other signs or signifiers, which acquire their meaning from their relationship to the nodal point (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). In this study the interview data revealed that these signs included indigenous concepts such as ‘time and treatment of students’, ‘teaching tools and strategies’, and ‘teacher-student relations’.

In the Laclau and Mouffe framework, different discourses offer different content to fill nodal points of identity with meaning (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 42). For example, the perceptions of the participants suggested that the sign ‘time and treatment of students’ could be associated with ensuring that teachers allocate approximately equal time to all their students and that all students should be treated in a similar manner inside and outside the

classroom. In contrast, ‘time and treatment of students’ was also associated with providing those positioned as ELLs with extra classroom support that might not be available to students who are not positioned in this way, for instance. The role of different discourses in participants’ identity construction is discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Understanding the participants’ construction of their professional ‘identity-in-practice’ was also an essential aim of data analysis. Therefore, drawing upon Wenger’s (1998) theory of identity, the data was read and re-read with the aim of identifying participants’ beliefs about how they engaged in the practices and activities they associated with the identity ‘teacher’, for instance. Examples from the data set that marked the construction of teachers’ ‘identity-in-practice’ therefore included references to their use of “teaching strategies and assessments” (Philip), their participation in the adaption of teaching materials (Cathy), and the steps they took “to be close to students” (Grace).

## Results

Based upon the conceptual framework for investigating teacher identity construction summarized in Figure 1, this section considers the discourses that shaped the participants’ construction of their professional identities. The discussion is organized in terms of four often repeated themes from the data set that, as described in the previous section, were used by the participants when discussing their perceptions of preparedness to teach in linguistically diverse classrooms and reflecting on their own teaching experiences during a teaching practicum. These themes are ‘inclusive and different?’; ‘time and treatment’; ‘tools, techniques, and strategies’; and ‘relationships’.

### Inclusive and Different?

Interviews with the six preservice teachers revealed that all participants referred to two distinct learner identities: ‘English language learner’ (ELL) and ‘non-ELL’. Representative of these views about learner identity, and their implications for the participant’s construction of their professional identities, are the comments of Stan:

#### *Excerpt One*

*It’s obvious, every ELL is different, the reality of schools today is that there’s so much diversity in the classroom – I saw it in my teaching practice- different language, culture, learning experiences, learning styles, ability, English ability – But it can be a big problem: as a teacher, day-in, day-out, how do I cope with that in class? How can I be inclusive and different? I mean, how do I make sure that all the students, all my different ELLs and the non-ELLs, can actually reach the same standard, the same learning outcome? How can I manage that? (Stan)*

Stan’s adamant opening declaration about classroom diversity (“Every ELL is different”) takes for granted the existence of the identity he labels ‘ELL’ (English language learner). An unquestioned commitment to the existence of this identity, which invokes the authority of his personal experience during a teaching practicum, is intelligible within the discourse of difference. For instance, Stan provides an explicit listing of the unmistakable markers of the diversity which he regards as “obvious”: language, culture, learning experiences, learning styles, and English ability, for instance. The discourse of difference is further evident in Stan’s later introduction of another identity position, that of “non-ELL”.

Although Stan does not describe the markers of this particular identity, the legitimacy of positioning some students as “non-ELL” is taken for granted.

While Stan’s claim that the existence of these different identities reflects the “reality of schools today” is intelligible from the perspective of the discourse of difference, it was not the sole discourse shaping the participants’ identity construction. Indeed, Stan’s alignment with the discourse of difference is questioned through a negative assessment of the impact of diversity on his own efforts to construct a professional identity. Linguistically, this move is signaled by the term “but” and, using weakened modality, the positioning of diversity in the classroom as potentially undesirable: “it can be a big problem”.

This challenge to Stan’s apparent alignment with the discourse of difference is intelligible from the perspective the alternative discourse of equity and inclusiveness. The presence of this discourse is evident in the linguistic choices Stan makes immediately following his apparent questioning of the discourse of diversity. For instance, his use of terms such as “all” (“*all* the students”) and “same” (the *same* standard, the *same* learning outcome”) signal a downplaying of diversity in favour of inclusiveness and uniformity.

In Stan’s reflection on his teaching practicum experience, the presence of both the discourse of difference and equity and inclusiveness has implications for the construction of his professional identity “as a teacher”. For example, the use of several rhetorical questions suggests uncertainty over of his identity construction. Much of this uncertainty is expressed in terms of an ambiguous relation to his engagement in the practice of teaching. Thus, while Stan unreservedly positions as a necessity the requirement that teachers “manage” and “cope” with learner diversity, the rhetorical questions he poses underscores his feelings of uncertainty about his own individual competency to simultaneously address the role of diversity and the need for equity and inclusiveness in his identity construction.

Also prominent in Stan’s construction of a professional identity is the work of imagination, as he looks beyond his practicum experience to a time when he faces such diversity “day-in, day-out”. Again, the use of rhetorical questions implies that the presence of both the discourse of difference and equity and inclusiveness shrouds this forward looking view in uncertainty.

Such uncertainty reflected a perception amongst the teacher participants that the discourses of equity and inclusiveness and of difference positioned them as teachers in mutually exclusive ways. In terms of the identity construction of these teachers, this result suggests that participants believed that, as teachers of ELLs, they encountered difficulties in reconciling in practice what they believe to be potentially competing demands of inclusivity and difference. The possibility of conflict was also reflected in their beliefs about how they treat students, including their allocation of classroom time, issues which are explored in the following section.

### **Time and Treatment**

The discourse of equity and inclusiveness and the discourse of difference also shaped participants’ professional identities by constructing particular meanings for teachers around issues of their treatment of students and decisions about the use of classroom time. Comments made by Brenda and Justin reflect the views expressed by four of the participants:

*Excerpt Two*

*I want to spend more time with my ELLs; I want to help them and make sure I can meet their needs, but I don't know how to do it without segregating them from everyone else, from the non-ELLs. What I must do is make sure all of them, every single student, feels equal, feels part of the class, part of the group. I need to treat all students the same in class, to be fair and open and not give special favours or treatment to some of them only. (Brenda)*

*Excerpt Three*

*I have to include all students as well as second language students; I need to make sure that, as their music teacher, what I do in the classroom benefits all my students and can match their needs. I think in my teaching that I should give roughly equal time and attention to all students. Is it fair to others if I spend much more time on ELLs? I don't want to isolate the others, to make them ask me in class 'why are they (ELLs) treated different? Why do they do different activities in class?'. That's not a good situation for a teacher to be in. (Justin)*

Brenda's opening statement provides insight into the type of identity conflict that many participants reported and which was evident, linguistically, in statements that gave voice simultaneously to both the discourses of equity and inclusiveness and difference. For example, Brenda's reference to two separate identity positions, "ELLs" and "non-ELLs" echoes the type of identity construction explored above in excerpt 1, a positioning of students that is comprehensible from within the discourse of difference. However, a discursive conflict is also preempted in her choice of the term "but", a move that is immediately linked to an adamant desire to avoid segregating these supposedly divergent identity positions, a preference which is consistent with the discourse of equity and inclusiveness.

Brenda's alignment with the discourse of equity and inclusiveness is also evident in the reference to her engagement in certain practices and activities. For example, a strongly modalized statement of doing ("what I *must do* is...") makes use of the values of inclusiveness and belonging to justify her need to ensure students "feel part of the class, part of the group". Drawing upon the discourse of equity and inclusiveness, the desirability of teachers engaging in practices that support the realization of inclusiveness and belonging, such as "treat(ing) all students the same in class", is presented as a taken for granted proposition. Similarly, her final appeal to the values of fairness and transparency within a decisive rejection of practices that give "special favours or treatment" to certain students is also belief rendered comprehensible from within the discourse of equity and inclusiveness.

Also invoking the discourse of equity and inclusiveness, Justin's initial statement represents a decisive appeal for inclusiveness: "I *have* to include all students...I *need* to make sure what I do in the classroom benefits *all* my students". In practice, such engagement in teaching suggests an alignment with the discourse of equity and inclusiveness, a commitment that he operationalizes by providing "equal time and attention" to all students, for example.

While maintaining a division between "ELLs" and "the others", a positioning of students that was argued above to be consistent with the discourse of difference, Justin also reveals the type of conflict that the simultaneous presence of both discourses implied for the efforts of the teacher participants to construct professional identities. For instance, drawing upon imagination, Justin conceives of a possible classroom scenario which associates the discourse of difference with the potential isolation of students. Invoking values such as fairness, Justin uses a rhetorical question to challenge this discourse over such an outcome. Linguistically, his explicit negative evaluation of this result is forcefully reflected in the choice of terms such as "I *don't want* to isolate the others..." and "*not a good situation* for a teacher to be in".

### Tools, Techniques, and Strategies

The discourses of equity / inclusiveness and of difference also competed to fill the identity “teacher” with meaning in terms of decisions participants made about tools, techniques, and strategies for teaching. This was a theme mentioned by several participants and is captured in the views of Philip and Cathy:

#### *Excerpt Four*

*As teachers, it's essential that we acknowledge English learners in the school community. On the other hand, the challenge I found during the teaching practice was that I needed to develop teaching strategies and tools and assessments to provide them with the extra classroom support they need to be successful. (Philip)*

#### *Excerpt Five*

*From my teaching practice experience, it's really important in teaching science concepts and getting them to understand complex vocabulary, that I can effectively adapt materials and my teaching style and technique to suit students from multiple backgrounds...but in my teaching practicum I also found that very difficult, really time-consuming. I wonder 'how practical it is?' ...all teachers have to face lots of admin duties and extra curricula activities to arrange....we share these responsibilities equally, I can't ask for less admin because I need to spend more time with English learners...the bottom line is that we're all part of a school community, we (teachers) all have these extra responsibilities beyond teaching, within the school; so I'm not just the science teacher...At the end of the day adaption is fine in theory but difficult in practice because it takes so much time. It's like a dilemma I never really resolved (Cathy)*

Philip's understanding of his professional development “as a teacher” is comprehensible within a discourse of difference. For example, he explicitly names the identity “English learners”, employing the term “they” to implicitly establish an identity of difference between this group of students and others in his classroom. The suggestion that it is “essential” to acknowledge “the needs of EAL students” underscores the strength of this commitment to differentiation. Moreover, in practice, this discourse necessitates the development of teaching techniques and assessment tools that provide this group of students with “extra classroom support”. This stance again differentiates these students from those implicitly positioned as “non-ELLs”, a move that is authorized through an appeal to achieving academic success. Such an outcome is uncritically seen as desirable by Philip and which therefore positively contributes to the construction of his identity as a teacher.

However, difference is again not the sole discourse that shaped participants' perceptions of identity construction. For example, despite Cathy's apparent unquestioning commitment to difference in the classroom (it's *really* important...that *I can effectively* adapt materials...”), she simultaneously invokes the discourse of equity and inclusiveness to cast doubt on the practicality of this form of participation in the practices and activities of teaching. Thus, the discourse of equality is voiced in the reference made to practices and activities, such as administrative and extra curricula responsibilities.

However, in contrast to the focus in previous sections on student learning outcomes (excerpt 1) and treatment of students (excerpt 2), Cathy describes situations in which equity amongst teachers poses challenges to her alignment with the discourse of difference. For instance, the need for “all teachers” to confront the same demands on their time and energy

beyond their teaching duties challenges some teaching practices and activities that would be consistent with a discourse of difference. Thus, the phrase “fine in theory but difficult in practice” serves to question the viability of teachers investing time in the adaptation of teaching materials and assessments to meet the needs of certain students.

### Relationships

The discursive struggle to construct professional identities was also revealed in attempts by these preservice teachers to develop close relations with students, a goal that was mentioned by each participant. In excerpt six, Cathy’s comments are representative of this view:

#### *Excerpt Six*

*As a teacher, I’m inclusive; I believe that I must do all I can to be close to students, to really work closely with them to understand all of them, I’m sensitive to their struggles... I have to show all of them I care about them, and need all of them, each and every student, to be feeling part of the (school) community. I really was working hard with my students during teaching practice, on a one-to-one level, to get an understanding of their problems, at home, school, whatever. All was great, fine when I worked with the Australian students, the regular students. On the other hand, for the ELLs, the language and cultural backgrounds are all over the place amongst them. It’s all so different from what I know, personally, in Australia. I’m worried I’ll be disappointed; there’s always going to be this gap between them and me, as their teacher. (Grace)*

In this excerpt, Grace begins with an adamant statement of her teacher identity (“As a teacher”). She reifies this identity in practice by describing her classroom engagement as inclusive. This strident statement of belief is authorized through reference to a series of values that she associates with this professional identity, including sensitivity, understanding, and caring. Her unquestioning allegiance to these beliefs is evident in her deployment of strongly modalized assertions (“I’m inclusive”) and the use of terms such as “must” and “have to”, and “need”. Grace reifies this identity in practice through engagement in teaching as “working hard” to understand students’ problems, offering an unqualified endorsement of the positive contribution of such practices to her identity construction: “all was great, fine...”. Evident in this positive experience of the construction of the teacher identity she places a premium upon are echoes of the discourse of equity and inclusiveness, such as the necessity for “each and every student” to be positioned as “part of the school community”.

Nevertheless, Grace’s capacity to align her engagement in teaching with practices and activities that are intelligible within the discourse of equity and inclusiveness is questioned by the presence of the alternative discourse of difference. Using the expression “on the other hand” to acknowledge this discursive challenge, she goes on to name several alternative identity categories. Thus, those positioned as “Australian students” or “regular students” are juxtaposed with the alternative learner identity “ELLs”. A division between these identities is authorized through reference to the diverse language and cultural backgrounds attributed to ELLs, which are characterized as being “all over the place”.

Moreover, it is this alleged divergence between these alternative learner identities which Grace regards as the most significant impediment to the realization in practice of inclusivity, which is a crucial marker of her own professional identity. As she put it, “there’s always going to be this gap between them and me, as their teacher”. It is not surprising then that this perceived threat to her efforts to define her preferred professional identity is negatively evaluated using expressions such as “worried” and “disappointed”. In this case, it is taken for granted that the “gap” between herself and her students, which is seen as a logical

outcome of the diversity she observed during a teaching practicum, is undesirable in terms of her professional identity construction.

## **Discussion**

Having considered the teacher participants' perceptions' of equity and inclusiveness as well as difference, this section examines how the interplay of these dominant discourses constrained and enabled the construction of their professional teacher identities. In Laclau and Moufe's (1985) framework, the interplay of discourses is characterized by competition; different discourses strive to fill identities with different meanings. Therefore, this section describes the ways in which the discourses of equity and inclusiveness and of difference competed to fill professional identities such as 'science teacher', 'drama teacher', and 'music teacher' with meanings.

### **Competing Demands on Time and Teacher Attention**

The struggle between the two dominant discourses that shaped the teacher participants' identity construction occurred partly in terms of competing demands placed upon teacher time and attention. The discourse of difference emphasized the necessity for teachers to allocate more time and attention to learners identified as ELLs, to meet their specific needs. In contrast, a discourse of equity and inclusiveness was interpreted by the participants as requiring that teachers provide approximately equal amounts of time and attention to all students. Competition between these discursive positionings is revealed in the conflict several participants reported between, on the one hand, their commitment to inclusivity by avoiding any practices that might be seen to either isolate "non-ELLs" or segregate "ELLs" and, on the other, a belief in the need for differentiation to ensure that all students can attain certain desired standards of learning.

### **Competing Demands on Teaching Strategy, Materials Development, and Assessments**

The discursive struggle between equity and inclusivity and difference also emerged as competing expectations placed upon the use of teaching strategies and the design of learning materials and assessments. Thus, some participants expressed a desire to "develop" and "adapt" these artifacts of teaching and learning in ways that would provide additional support to ELLs, a position made intelligible within a discourse of difference. However, in questioning this stance, some participant's invoked meanings of teaching that implicate a discourse of inclusiveness. For example, Cathy's challenge to the capacity of teachers to adapt strategies, materials, and assessments to the needs of ELLs ("adaption is fine in theory but difficult in practice", excerpt five) is made meaningful from within such a discourse. In this case, the appeal to inclusiveness was made at the level of the collective school community, associating all teachers with the necessity of shouldering administrative and extra-curricular responsibilities that called into question their capacity to simultaneously fill demands placed upon them by the discourse of difference such as the need to adapt teaching strategies, materials and assessment for their ELLs.

### **Competing Demands on Interpersonal Relations**

Another meaning associated with the identity ‘teacher’ was the need to establish close interpersonal relations with students. From the perspective of the discourse of equity and inclusiveness, teachers should establish such relations with all their students as means of honoring values associated with taking on this professional identity, including the need to understand and care about each of their students “on a one-to-one level”. According to this discourse, realizing such values in practice is one means of ensuring that all learners become part of the broader school community.

These aims for identity construction, however, are regarded as problematic within a discourse of difference. For instance, referring to the “reality of schools today”, several participants questioned their capacity to achieve the type of closeness to all students that was endorsed by the goal of inclusivity. Linguistically, this pessimism is underpinned by an implicit acceptance of the existence of different ethnically-based identity groupings and the subsequent positioning of such groups as “very different” from alternative identity positions, such as “non-ELLs”.

### **Conflict and Identity Construction**

Although statements of government policy in New South Wales, which were discussed earlier in this paper, reflected the presence of both the discourse of equality and inclusiveness and difference, policy makers appear to have given much less attention to how such discourses might interact to shape teachers’ professional identities. As a result, the identity conflicts described in the previous section, and the implications such conflict has for this identity construction work, remain largely unexplored. Therefore, a contribution of this study is to not only locate the presence of the dominant discourses shaping preservice teachers’ construction of their professional identities as teachers of ELLs but also to consider how interactions between these discourses can constrain and enable this identity construction.

The findings reported in this paper support some earlier research suggesting that many mainstream teachers perceive that they are ill-prepared to work with ELLs (Evans, Arnot-Hopffer, & Jurich, 2005; Hutchinson & Hadjioannou, 2011; Reeves, 2006; Siwatu, 2011; Webster & Valeo, 2011). This study builds upon this research by considering the role identity construction can play in the perceptions’ of preservice mainstream teachers about their preparedness to teach ELLs. Thus, although the NSW Government’s multicultural educational policy and advice to schools concerning English as an additional language or dialect, as described earlier in this paper, do not assume that discourses such as equality and inclusiveness and difference offer mutually exclusive identity positions to preservice teachers, the perceptions of the preservice teachers who participated in this study reveal challenges in reconciling what they believe to be the conflicting identity positions made available to them within these discourses.

These conflictual views might be one symptom of what Mills (2008; 2013) describes as the superficial treatment of inclusivity in some preservice teacher education, in which diversity is addressed through “add-on piecemeal approaches”, such as the addition of “a course or two on multicultural education” and that have met “with little success” (Mills, 2008, p. 268). According to Mills (2008), this approach “does not go far enough” (p. 268) and, therefore, teacher education programs should reconsider their treatment of diversity. The results of this study add weight to the need for this reconsideration because the perceptions of identity conflict that the participants reported are unlikely to benefit mainstream classroom teachers or their learners. Therefore, the remainder of this paper considers how such conflict

can be addressed in order to support the construction the professional identities of teachers of ELLs.

### **Making Discourses Visible**

Assisting teachers move beyond the identity struggles described in the previous section could begin by “making discourses visible” (Davies, 1994, p. 16). For example, Davies (1994) advocated engagement in conversations that are based not on relations of antagonism but, rather, in which participants seek to understand what is said from the perspective of other participants, thereby “connecting threads between the meanings available to one with the meanings being expressed by the other” (p. 27). Kayi-Aydar (2015) pointed out the benefits of such conversations for teacher identity construction: “When preservice are provided opportunities to gain the right to speak, they will be able to form positive selves and strong professional identities” (p. 101).

Teacher professional development has long recognized the value of such conversations between teachers, in the form of teacher support groups, for instance (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Nevertheless, if such conversations are to multiply the ways in which mainstream teachers of ELLs teachers see the world of teaching they will need to undergo critical interrogation and reflection. Farrell (2015), therefore, refers to the need for teacher reflection aimed at “unearthing and identifying previously unquestioned norms in society, the community, and the classroom” (p. 96). As Zembylas (2014, p. 212) explained:

*The teacher as a critical reflective practitioner is aware both of the socio-historical reality which shapes his or her life and of his or her capacity to change this reality.*

Unearthing and identifying the previously unquestioned socio-historical reality shaping the professional lives of teachers of ELLs, which Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) labelled the “unmasking” of discourses (p. 185), could employ the type of discourse analysis undertaken in this study. Indeed, the use of discourse analytic techniques has been seen to “allow (teacher) candidates to focus specifically on how their linguistic and non-verbal choices impact the enactment of identities related to teaching and learning” (Schieble, Vetter, & Meacham, 2015, p. 258). Thus, in the case of the current study, stakeholders - preservice and inservice teachers, school authorities, teacher educators, ELLs, and their parents - could meet as part of a teaching and learning support group to discuss their approaches to teaching, including curriculum planning, materials development, and assessment. This might also include team teaching and peer observation. If such activities were recorded and transcribed, these multiple texts could be subjected to the type of discourse analysis undertaken in this paper to explore who is speaking, from what position, in what context, and with what effect in terms of the subject positions that are made available to all teachers. These conversations could also address calls for greater awareness amongst teachers of bilingualism and bicultural literacy practices, thereby contesting teachers’ orientations that might be grounded in a deficit view of linguistically and culturally diverse students and their families (Fenner, 2014). As Sharma and Lazar (2014) argue, such awareness “includes teachers’ examining their own values, beliefs, and assumptions, and the opportunities to practice in environments where the teacher’s cultural and linguistic background differs from students’ background” (p. 5).

Acknowledging the existence of multiple subject positions is a crucial step in enhancing teacher agency “since being able to imagine alternatives is a first step towards attaining them” (Crooks, 2013, p. 194). However, as Pennycook (2001) pointed out, promoting such agency will require more than the unmasking of discourses. Mills (2008), for example, argues that it is essential to provide preservice teachers with “opportunities for critical reflection on intercultural experiences with a support group” (p. 272) Therefore, to

address the need for such “critical reflection”, a further essential step will be to consider these discourses as contingent, meaning that while identities at a given time take a particular form “they could have been – and can become – different” (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 37).

Awareness that their positioning by dominant discourses is contingent can be a powerful force for teacher identity construction because, as Davies (1994) pointed out, it opens the possibility for “multiple ‘Is’” (p.27) by offering stakeholders the possibility of positioning themselves differently in relation to these discourses. Thus, one aim of the critical conversations described in this section would be to consider the contingent nature of the discourse of equity and inclusiveness and difference, to open up possibilities for teachers to construct “multiple I’s” (Davies, 1994, p. 34) by questioning the perception that teachers face a stark either / or choice between the demands placed upon them as teachers of ELLs by these different discourses.

This more complex understanding of their identities as teachers does not seek to replace one set of hegemonic discourses with another but rather to offer, as Davies (1994) put it, a “new way of seeing made possible by listening to the other” (p. 27). This experience, which Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) refer to as “the unmasking of taken-for-granted naturalized knowledge” (p. 185), could enhance agency by allowing teachers to occupy the borderland (Alsup, 2006) between the discourses of teachers and teaching they confront and from there to explore their capacity to change this reality by, for example, considering when it is possible to resist such positionings and when there is little realistic choice other than to comply (Davies, 1994).

Developing these more complex understanding of preservice teachers’ professional identities and their positioning by discourses such as equity and inclusiveness and difference would address calls to go beyond the superficial way in which some believe teacher education programs address diversity (Mills, 2008; 2013). Thus, the opportunities for critical discourse analysis, reflection, and the construction of “multiple I’s” (Davies, 1994, p. 34) described here could problematize preservice teachers’ perceptions of a binary division between equity and inclusiveness on the one hand, and difference on the other. As a result, these proposals add depth to recent suggestions that teacher education programs should deal with issues of diversity from different perspectives over several semesters (Mills, 2008; 2013). For example, the results of this study imply that one such perspective should be that of teacher identity construction and that opportunities be available for preservice teachers to critically reflect on their experiences of identity construction within linguistically diverse classrooms before, during, and after a teaching practicum.

## Conclusion

Framed by a theory of teacher identity construction, this study considered the perceptions of preparedness to teach in linguistically diverse classrooms amongst one group of Australian preservice mainstream teachers. The study explored the ways in which these perceptions are shaped by dominant discourses surrounding ELLs. In particular, the study suggested that interaction between such discourses can result in competition to define the meaning of identities such as teacher of ELLs and that this can result in unintended identity conflict for teachers if they are unable to reconcile the competing demands different discourses place upon their professional identities.

Although set within a single educational setting, the findings of this study have implications for researchers, policy makers, teacher educators, and teachers in educational contexts that contain significant numbers of ELLs. For instance, the results of this study underscore the importance of identifying not only the dominant discourses that surround

ELLs in particular educational settings but also of considering how such discourses interact in ways that can result in previously unconsidered constraints to teacher identity construction. Future research might adopt a longitudinal approach to explore the dynamic, evolving construction of professional identities by teachers of ELLs over an extended time period. Indeed, this research can be extended to explore the perceptions and experiences of teachers, both preservice and in-service, not only in relation to teaching ELLs but also other learners with special needs, disabilities, and students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background, for example. This longitudinal research could examine how a variety of discourses shape teachers construction of their professional identities in the case of these different learners, not only as teachers cross boundaries between teacher education programs and full time teaching positions within schools but also how such discourses shape their ongoing identity construction during different stages of their educational career.

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